Quality of life as a decision criterion

The most important one?

Target audience: everyone interested,
no special knowledge necessary

Reading time: 10-15 minutes

Page layout: allows easy reading
without scrolling,
even on
very small screens

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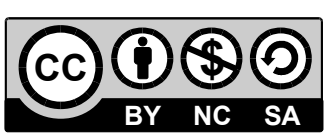

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Before we begin, you may want to know this:

This text is a (slightly edited) excerpt from the book
'Decision making, politics and quality of life' by Edgar Hartel.

Most examples, and all persons or organizations
appearing in them, are invented.

Contents

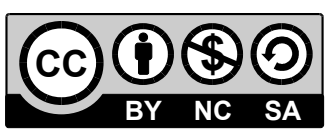
of the

PDF e-book

Decision Making, Politics and Quality of Life

by

Edgar Hartel



Chapters

1. Introduction - A short one
2. Problems. All sorts, all sizes.
   Where do they come from?
3. What is a 'good' or 'bad' decision?
   A definitions intermezzo
4. What happens when bad decisions are made frequently?
   About circles and spirals
5. How can bad decisions be avoided?
   A short answer
6. Which factors hinder good decision making? - An overview
7. How to overcome the factors that hinder good decision making
   Approaches and methods
8. Decision making theory vs. real life
   Why available tools are not used
9. An appeal: how you can contribute
   Better decisions, less problems
10. Conclusion - A short one

Appendices

A. Quality of life as a decision criterion
   The most important one?
B. Is there a 'mother of all problems' ?
   How to solve interconnected problems
C. Do not create larger problems while solving the original one
   Where is the grass greener?
D. Factors that hinder good decision making - Briefly explained
E. Quality standards for decision making
   What they could look like
F. How to visualize and evaluate decision options - Step by step
G. How to make and use argument maps
   Avoid endless discussions
H. Miscellaneous
   Acknowledgements, remarks, contact information

Quality of life as a decision criterion

The most important one?

Estimated reading time: 10-15 minutes

An important part of decision making is the evaluation of available options.

Decision makers who work systematically therefore compile a list of criteria, and then evaluate the option/criterion combinations.

Examples of often used criteria are: total costs, expected gain, implementation time, feasibility.

Quality of life is seldom found on a criteria list.

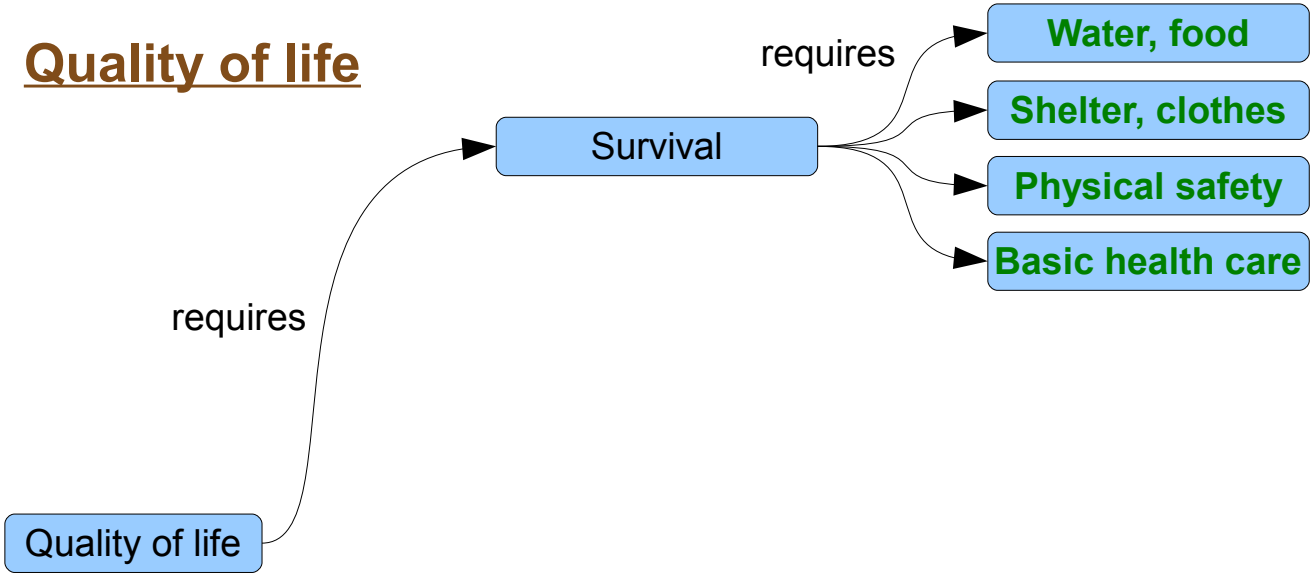
This gives the impression that it is not important or relevant.

Let's have a closer look.

Progress

Intro	done
Quality of life ...	
... definition	up next
... yours and others	
... as a decision criterion	
... and problems	

Quality of life

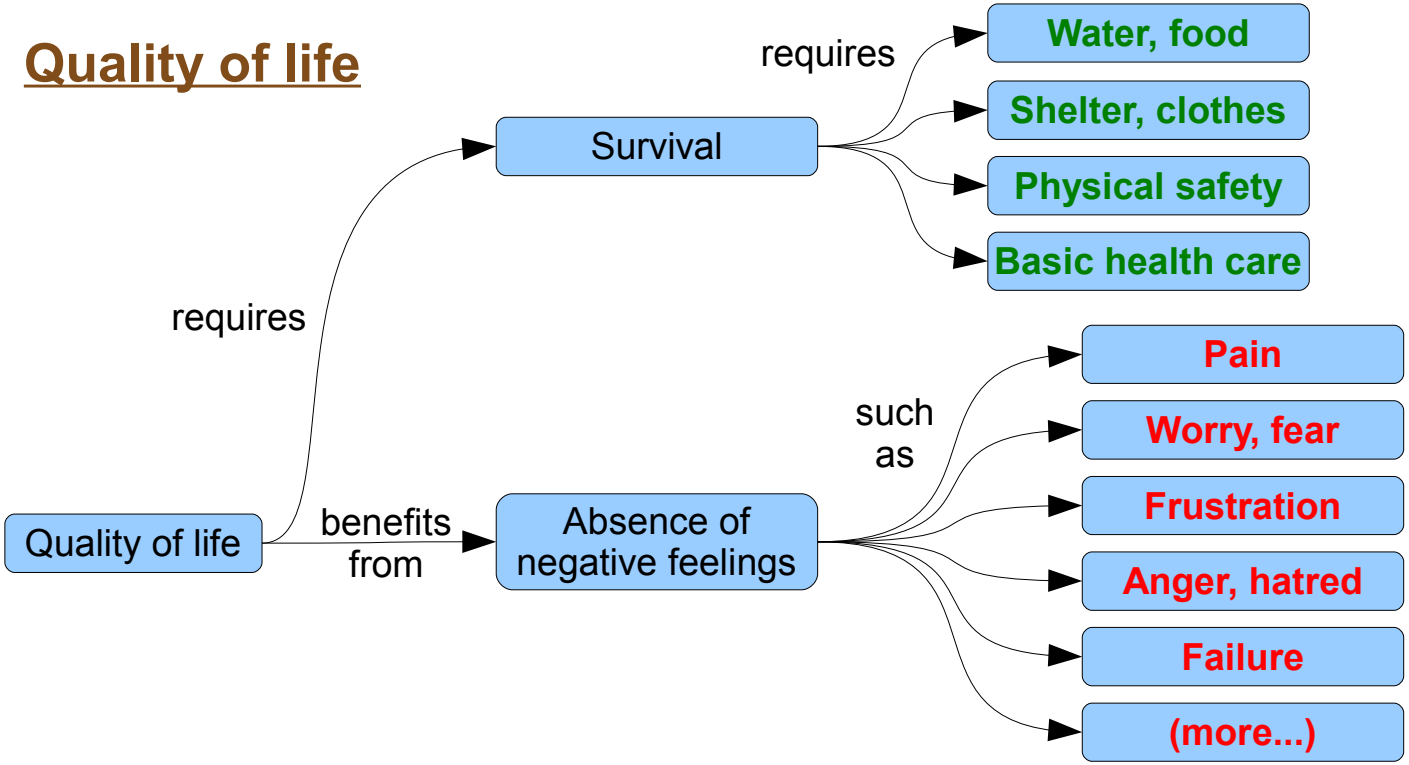


Quality of life depends on 3 factors.

The most essential one is survival.

Fig. A.1a : quality of life

Quality of life



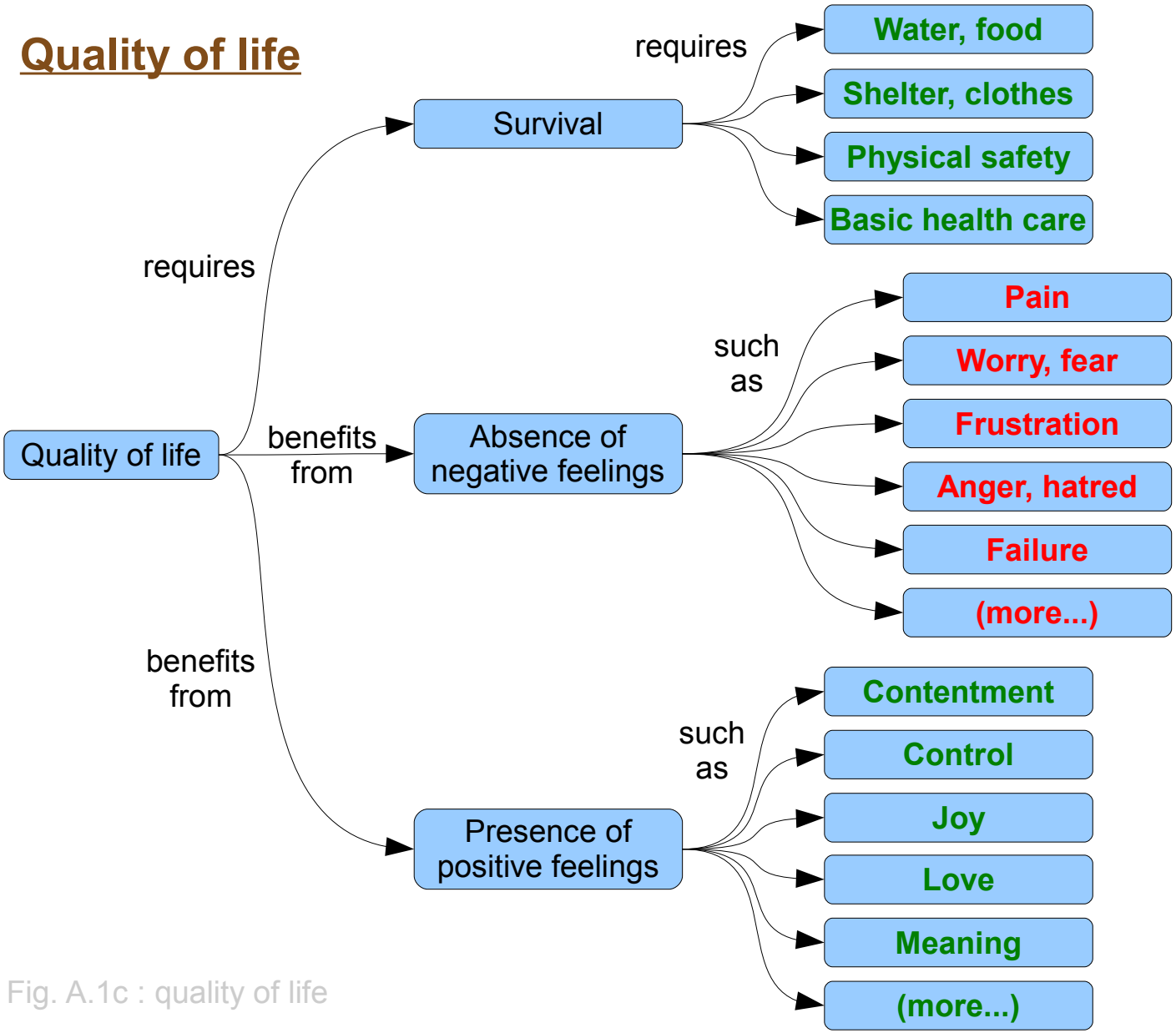
Quality of life depends on 3 factors.

The most essential one is survival.

The second factor is the absence of negative feelings.

Fig. A.1b : quality of life

Quality of life



Quality of life depends on 3 factors.

The most essential one is survival.

The second factor is the absence of negative feelings.

The third factor is the presence of positive feelings.

Fig. A.1c : quality of life

Quality of life can be positive ('I enjoy life'), neutral or negative ('I suffer in life').

Using a high/low scale is also common.

Quality of life is mostly subjective by its nature. However, some parts of it can be measured, compared and even predicted by outside observers.

Quality of life can change from minute to minute. But usually one refers to its average over days or weeks.

There is a continuous range between the positive and negative extremes.

Quality of life is similar in meaning to well-being.

Positive quality of life is similar in meaning to happiness.

Periods with negative quality of life are sometimes in retrospect regarded as valuable (character building, or otherwise necessary) for one's life.

Such a view can be either well-founded, or rather be the result of psychological self defence (the mind creates a more pleasant past for itself).

Both positive and negative feelings can be caused by events that happened in the past, are happening in the present, or are expected to (possibly) happen in the future.

Therefore personal experiences and expectations can have a strong influence on quality of life.

Example:

Even if your present circumstances are just perfect, your quality of life could be negative if you spent last year in a war zone, or if you expect to lose your job next year.

Progress

Intro	done
Quality of life ...	
... definition	done
... yours and others	up next
... as a decision criterion	
... and problems	

Apart from outer circumstances, your quality of life also depends on your personality.

Hence people with different personalities can easily experience widely different qualities of life under the same outer circumstances.

Some people have a personal bias towards negative feelings, which is sometimes a survival advantage.

Examples: fear can help us to avoid danger, worries can motivate us to prepare for future emergencies.

Other people have a personal bias towards positive feelings. They are the happier ones.

Progress

Intro	done
Quality of life ...	
... definition	done
... yours and others	done
... as a decision criterion	up next
... and problems	

We need to distinguish between
two types of decisions:

A) personal decisions,
which affect yourself
and perhaps a few others

B) larger-scale decisions,
political or not,
which affect many people

In your personal decision making, your quality of life should always be high on your criteria list.

Whether it should top the list depends on your value system.

Specifically, it depends on how important ethical behaviour (or simply consideration for others) is for you.

Selfish individuals will put their own quality of life above everything else.

However, from a civic point of view, it is much better if ethical behaviour outranks your own quality of life on your criteria list.

In other words: pursue your happiness, but don't make other people pay for it.

Also in larger-scale decision making quality of life should always be considered.

In the case of political decisions, everyone affected by them can rightfully demand just that.

Compared to personal decisions, at least two aspects are different:

1. the decision maker needs to somehow foresee other people's quality of life

2. there can be very many other people affected

The second aspect can be addressed by considering groups rather than individuals.

This reduces the number of considerations from 'unmanageable high' to typically 5 to 10.

A very low number of considered groups could indicate that minorities are being ignored.

Examples of such groups:
people who commute by car,
people who commute by public transport, people who are exposed to road traffic noise,
and
people who will live in this region in 50 years

But what about the first aspect?

Attempting to foresee someone else's quality of life is difficult, and the results would often be wrong.

It is much easier to foresee how someone else's quality of life would change under certain conditions.

Example: it's hard to tell exactly how happy the residents of a suburb will be next week. But if the authorities now announce plans for a nearby chemical factory, it's fair to assume that they will be less happy than otherwise.

The bottom line is, the decision maker's criteria list should include (typically 3 to 8) criteria such as these examples:

- impact on quality of life for group A (people who commute by car)

- impact on quality of life for group B (people who commute by public transport)

Whether quality of life criteria get higher or lower priority than other criteria (e.g. costs, profit) depends on the decision maker's value system.

Some decision makers do not care much about other groups' quality of life. Consequently, they prefer not to have those criteria on their lists.

The following applies to
both personal and large-scale
decision making.

There is another reason why
quality of life is seldom found on
a criteria list (if there is any):

It is easily confused with other
criteria such as income, wealth,
employment, comfort, status,
power and growth.

Any of these criteria can
contribute to better quality of life,
up to a certain point.

Beyond that point,
a 'more is better' strategy can cause
so serious unwanted side effects
that quality of life
actually becomes worse.

Sometimes it is smart to have selected criteria more than once on the list, with each instance referring to a different time frame.

Examples:
monthly operating costs (this year),
monthly operating costs (in 3 years),
short-term impact on quality of life,
long-term impact on quality of life

Decision makers tend to focus much more on short-term effects than on long-term effects.

But these may differ a lot from each other. In such cases, poor foresight will very likely cause problems later on.

Progress

Intro	done
Quality of life ...	
... definition	done
... yours and others	done
... as a decision criterion	done
... and problems	up next

Quality of life is better if there are fewer problems around.

Especially if the problems threaten survival.

The diagrams on the next pages show some examples.

Quality of life vs. problems

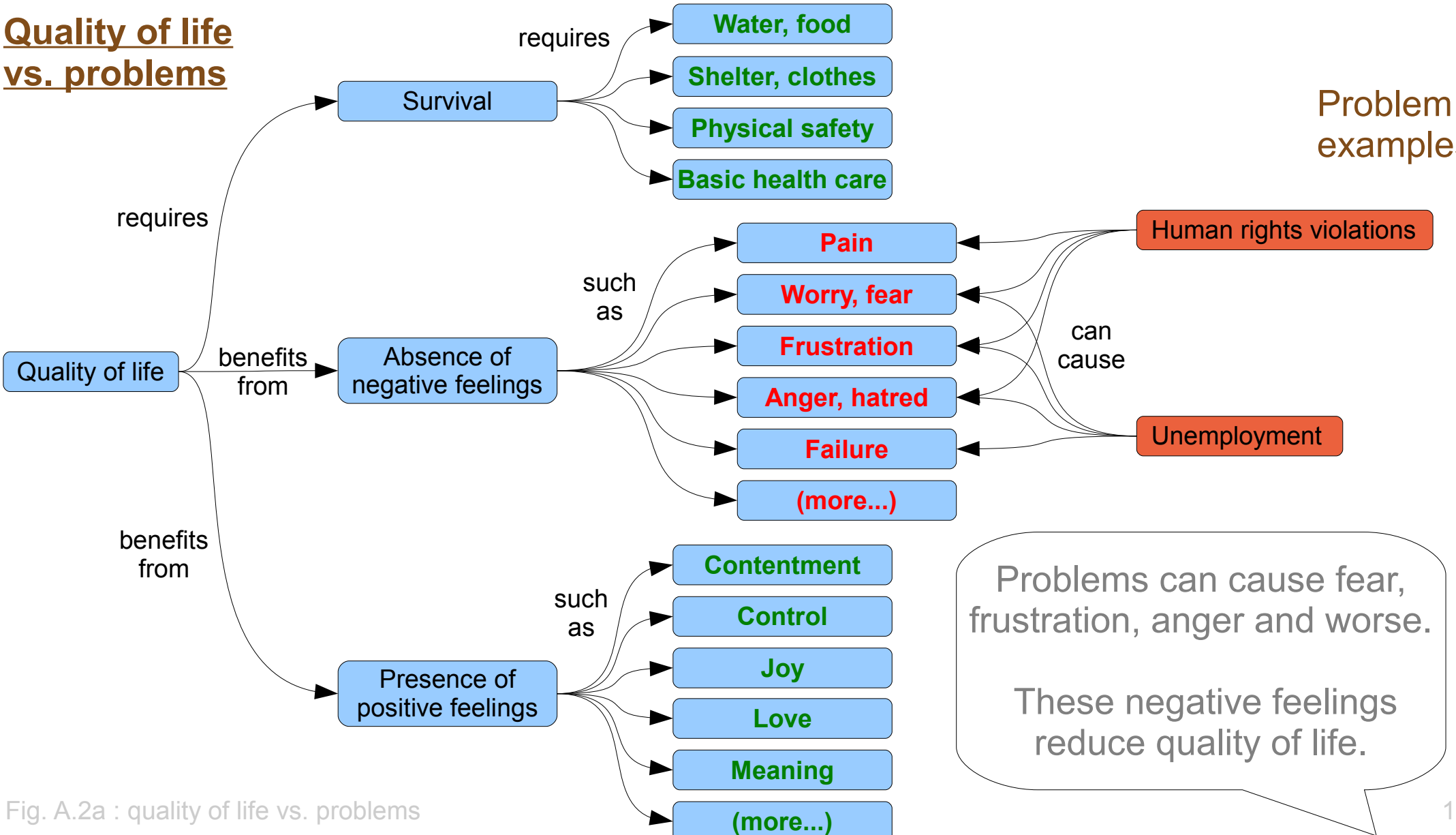


Fig. A.2a : quality of life vs. problems

Quality of life vs. problems

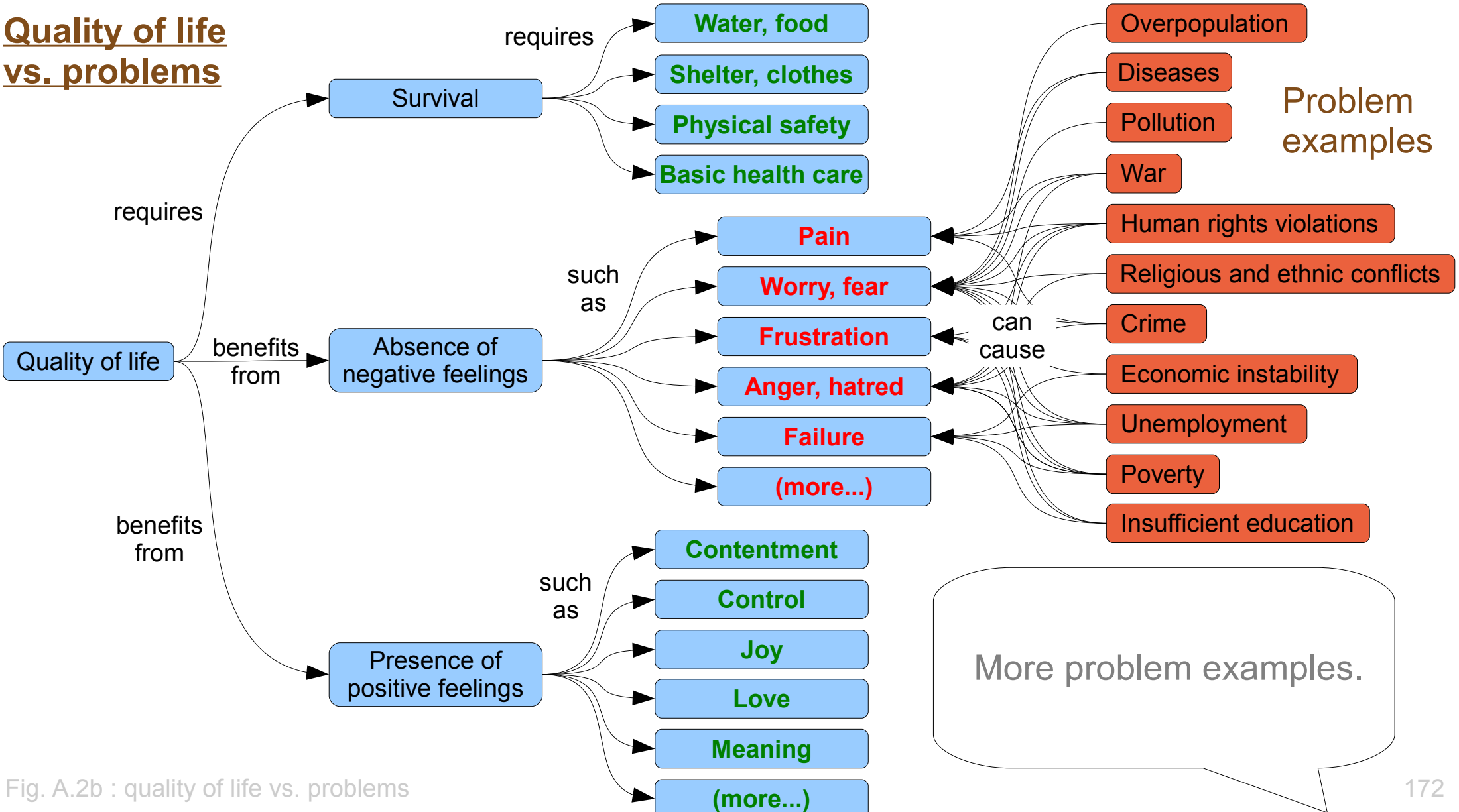


Fig. A.2b : quality of life vs. problems

Quality of life vs. problems

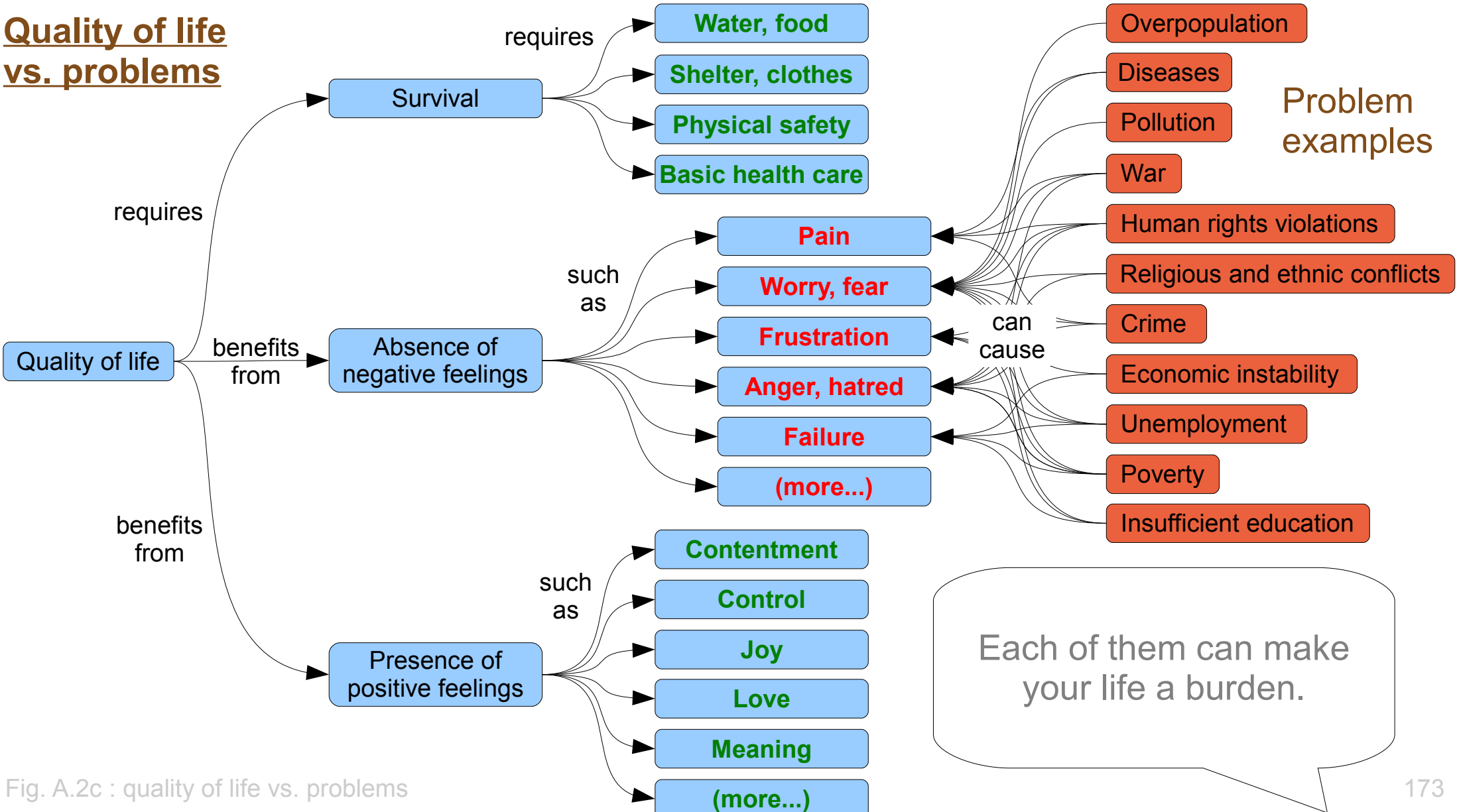
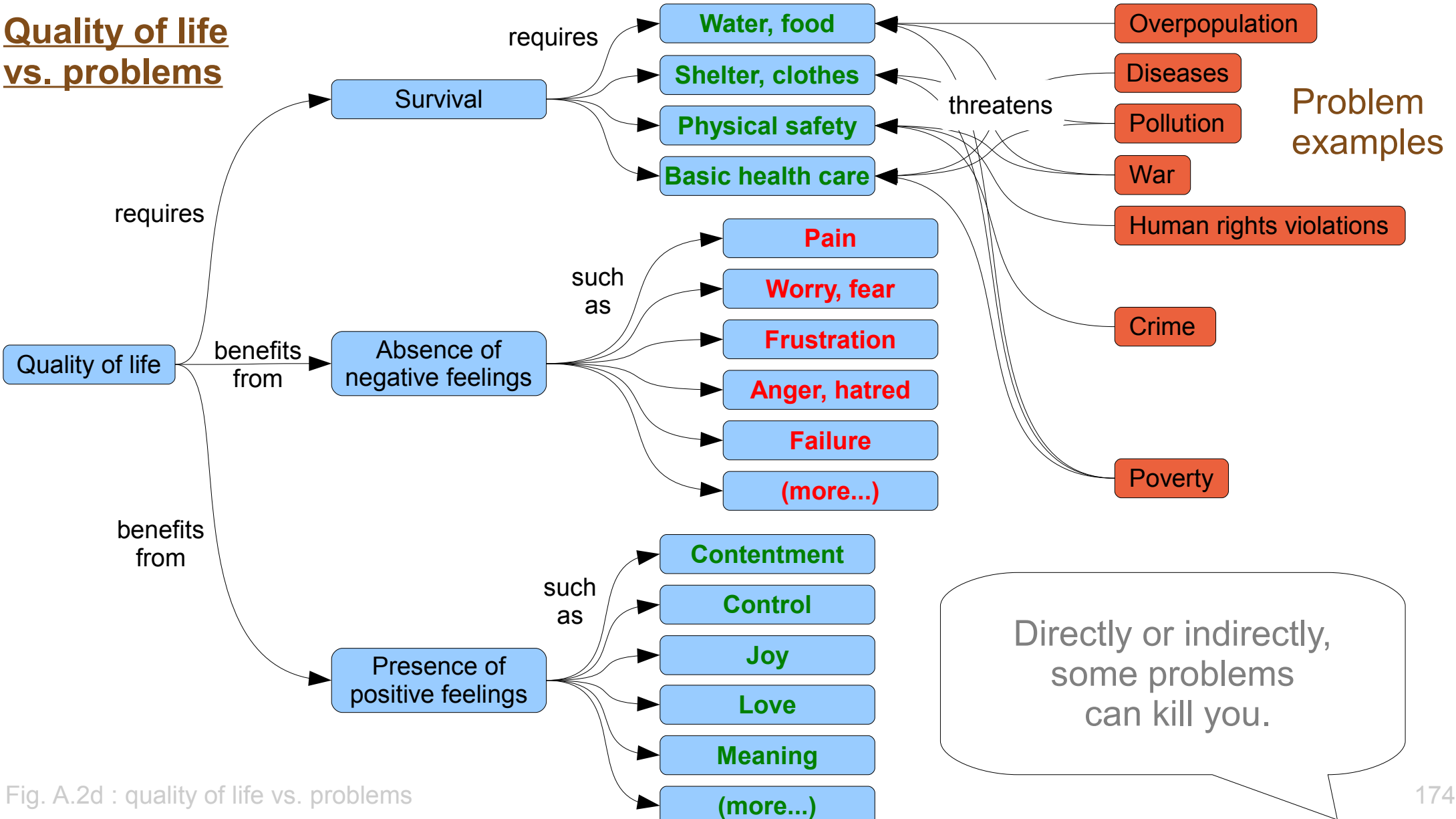


Fig. A.2c : quality of life vs. problems

Quality of life vs. problems



Quality of life vs. problems

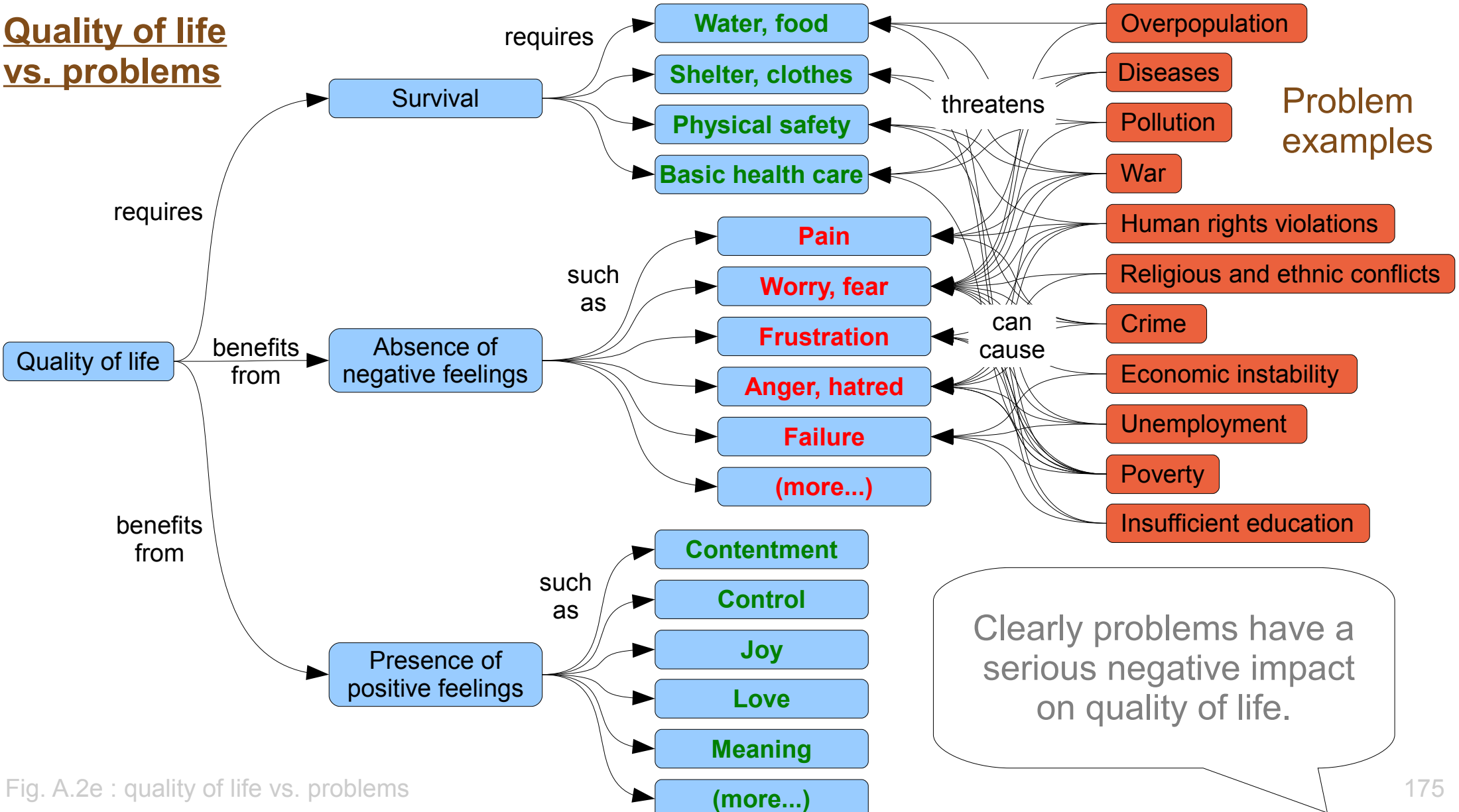


Fig. A.2e : quality of life vs. problems

Quality of life vs. problems

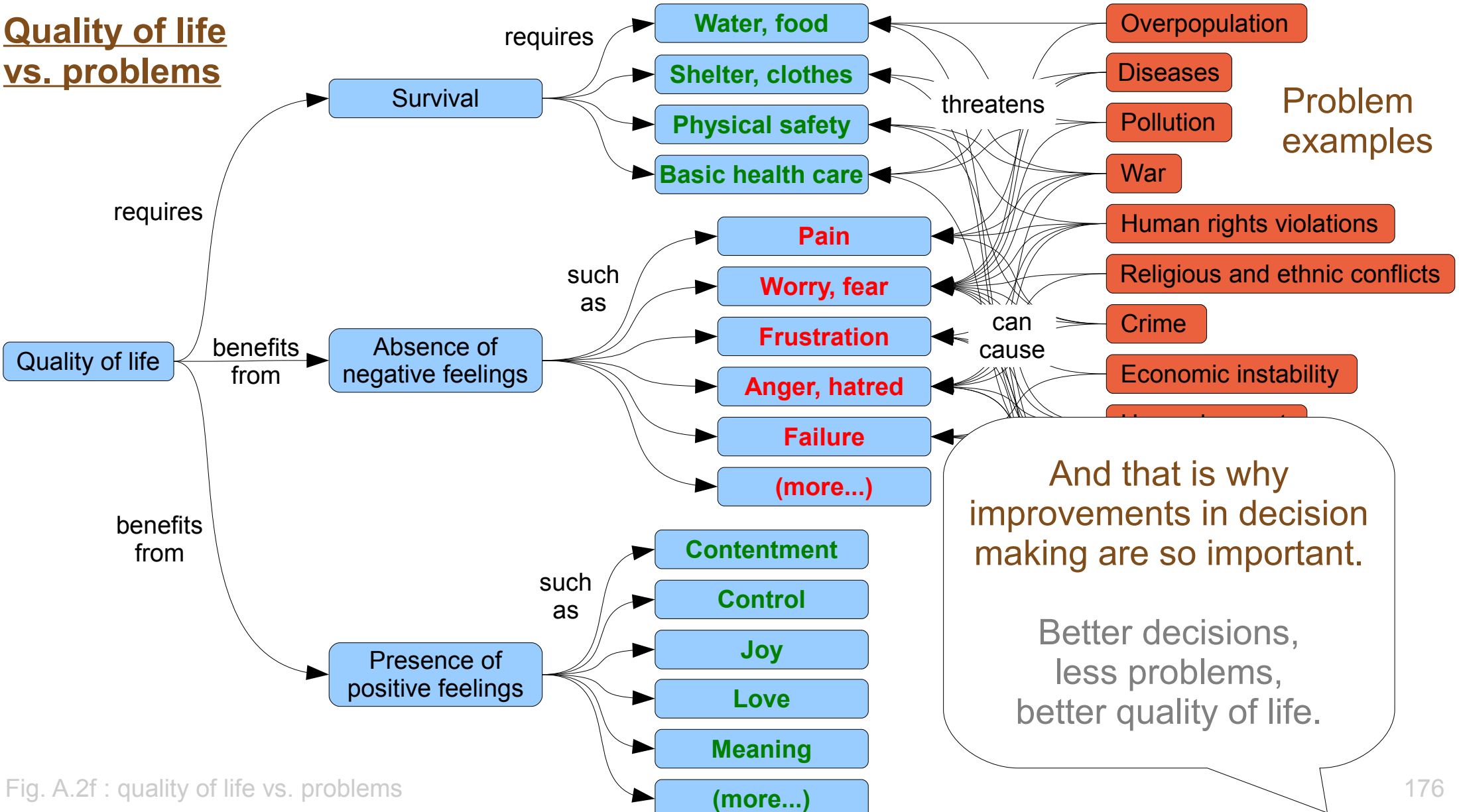


Fig. A.2f : quality of life vs. problems

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of this excerpt.

If you've read it: Thank you.